Teaching a New Generation of Citizen-Soldiers: How a congressional simulation exercise helps to develop future leaders of character at the United States Military Academy

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Abstract

The U.S. Military Academy's American Politics Congressional Simulation Exercise (SIMEX) exposes future military leaders to the formal and informal processes, procedures, and actors that civil authorities must navigate in order to formulate U.S. law, policy, and strategy. The interactive, multi-disciplinary simulation exercise (SIMEX) requires students to assume the roles of members of Congress, media, interest groups, and presidential advisors who work to pass a bill presents cadets with distinct leadership challenges and educational opportunities. The SIMEX helps future military leaders to become cognizant of the political pressures that impact civilian leaders who control the national security apparatus. Cadets get to experience decision making methods in ways a classroom study of law, regulation and politics is unable to provide. Most importantly, cadets gain an understanding of where military officers fit into public policy while reflecting on the military's subordination to civilian leadership.

Simulation
Leadership
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The U.S. Military Academy's American Politics Congressional Simulation Exercise (SIMEX) exposes future military leaders to the formal and informal processes, procedures, and actors that civil authorities must navigate in order to formulate U.S. law, policy, and strategy. Unlike a SIMEX in any other institution of higher learning, West Point's Department of Social Sciences offers cadets the opportunity to experience the political process through the mindset of those civilian lawmakers, elected politicians, and industry lobbyists who will ultimately influence the course of each cadet's future uniformed service to the nation.

The SIMEX at the United States Military Academy is an innovation to political science's signature pedagogy. Murphy and Reidy, in their work documenting the international political science community, leverage Schulman's notion of a signature pedagogy in political science focused on teacher-centric large lectures, or small group seminars.[1]

While these methodologies of teaching political science focus on the surface structure and perhaps even the deep structure of Schulman's signature pedagogy, the SIMEX is an attempt to access the implicit structure of the political science pedagogy because it requires students of political science to interact with each other under the constitutional, legal, and political constraints that both academics and practitioners of political science endure in the policy-making arena.

This paper will explain the SIMEX process and how the assessment efforts inform not only future methods of teaching American Politics course requirements, but also how this exercise reinforces cadet leader development and meets course, departmental, and institutional outcomes with respect to leadership and civil-military relations.

A simulation exercise is a robust, multidisciplinary learning experience that connects several learning objectives into a single culminating learning experience (Bernstein, Scheerhorn, & Ritter, 2002; Maxwell, 2012). Simulations allow students to immerse themselves in a virtual scenario to help experience the content in a way that cannot be easily replicated in a traditional class lecture format (Zaino & Mulligan, 2009). As Promley (2013) explains, "simulations help students engage more deeply with course material, understand complexity, perform better on assignments, and better retain material over time" (p. 819).

West Point's interactive, multi-disciplinary SIMEX requires students to assume the roles of members of Congress, media, interest groups, and presidential advisors who work to pass a bill, and presents cadets with distinct leadership challenges and educational opportunities. During the exercise, students test their political knowledge as well as their negotiation, communication, leadership, and ethics skills (all of which are desired classroom, course, and institutional outcomes). Such a pedagogical approach to learning about the U.S. government is not unique, but the way in which the SIMEX incorporates the role of a standing military in a democratic society is something only a military academy can offer. Throughout the semester, blocks of instruction expose cadets to the tenets of civilian control of the military, the military officer's oath to the Constitution, and positive and negative examples of officer's involvement in governance and the policy-making process.

At West Point, all cadets take American Politics as part of their core course requirements. At the heart of the course is the understanding and appreciation of how a bill becomes law when they debate and ultimately vote on a bill. West Point borrowed the idea of a SIMEX from a similar exercise at Harvard University. The Fall 2015 SIMEX was the 11th iteration of a SIMEX; our goal is for our collective experience to inform and shape future iterations of the SIMEX.

The United States Military Academy updated its *West Point Leader Development System* (WPLDS) in 2014 to reflect eight distinct characteristics that each graduate of the United States Military Academy should embody. These attributes explain and define leadership for all students and faculty at West Point and serve as the benchmark of all three pillars of cadet life; academic, military, and physical. In addition, cadets are bound by the United States Military Academy's Honor Code, which states "A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal or tolerate those who do." The SIMEX directly contributes to cadet leader education and training in each area outlined in the WPLDS.

SIMEX includes various metrics and measures to assess its effectiveness in teaching students the political process and refining their other leader development outcomes. SIMEX supports the Academy's efforts to inform not only curriculum change but also departmental and institutional outcomes.

1. Literature Review

Active learning techniques "promote engagement with both the discipline material and learning" (Van Amburgh, et al, 2007, p. 1) and require the student to interact with the content on many levels to inspire critical thinking and analysis (Michael, 2007; McKeachie, 1994). These learning strategies can take many forms, including journals, debates, role playing, simulations, case studies, in-depth discussions, demonstrations, or in-class activities that require the students to actively participate in the learning as opposed to passive, stimulus-response learning.

The SIMEX is designed to build on and develop higher orders of thinking, including what Suskie (2009) describes as evaluation, problem-solving, decision-making, synthesis and creativity, critical thinking, and information literacy. As Suskie (2009) further explains, application "is the capacity to use knowledge and understanding in a new context" and analysis "is the capacity to break a complex concept apart to understand the relationships of its components" (p. 120).

Simulations are particularly popular in teaching the political science concepts of civil engagement, political efficacy, and cultural awareness (Young, et al, 2012), most likely due to the fact that making or passing a law, campaigning, running a state/local government, or navigating a bureaucracy, is process-intensive and can be partially replicated through role-playing. (Sands & Shelton, 2010; Bernstein, Scheerhorn, & Ritter, 2002). Simulations can run the gamut from a full semester, to a few classes; to single sections or large, combined classes across several disciplines. This technique gained traction among political science faculty, and political science and education journals have published a multitude of articles on running simulations. For example, between 2005 and 2011, *PS: Political Science and Politics* alone published 73 articles devoted to simulations (Ishiyama, 2013).

A simulation may also provide a significant opportunity for course, departmental, and institutional assessment. When developing the simulation, instructors weigh the learning objectives of the course and the leader development system, examine the expected outcomes, and determine how these factors can be measured. Sands and Shelton (2010) suggest four primary learning outcomes from a Congressional simulation:

1. The student will develop a better appreciation for the complicated process by which a bill becomes law.
2. The student will gain insight into Congress as a deliberative institution, and will identify the parts of the legislative process where deliberation takes place.
3. The student will recognize that Congress is an institution that creates motivations of competing self-interest, yet its members, while pursuing their own interests, often end up advancing the common good.
4. The student will examine any initial skepticism and criticism regarding Congress by analyzing those attitudes through the lens of the simulation experience (p. 134).

In addition to course-level learning outcomes, there are other broader, institutional outcomes that can be included. Kathlene and Choate (1999) would add communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution to the list of key outcomes, all of which support the WPLDS model as well.

But do these outcomes advance learning objectives? While it is widely accepted that they do, the evidence is unclear. Most of the assessment data are anecdotal or results of self-reported efficacy surveys. As Wedig (2010) noted, "assessing the impact of simulation exercises on student learning is difficult, given that a proper research design for doing so does not merely assess learning within a course, but also compares courses with simulations to identical ones without simulations" (p. 555). Anecdotal assessment data makes it difficult to specifically determine the impact of the experience on course, program, and institutional goals.

However it is done, Mealy (2012) suggests that assessment "needs to move from describing to actually measuring our teaching and students' learning" (p. 526). Assessments for experiences like simulations do not have to be complicated or complex. Galatas (2006) examined the extent of extra-classroom contact between students and evaluated the effectiveness of the simulation in supporting the learning objectives and overall perceptions of the experience. He accomplished this using a short survey and reflective writing assignments.

A myriad of options exists to evaluate learning outcomes. A reflective essay can be used (Kaarbo & Lantis, 1997; Wallin, 2005) or some combination of an essay with pre- or post-test questions (Biziouras, 2013). Roper (2004) included short assessments periodically throughout a semester-long exercise, and also included questions related to course content that should have been mastered in the simulation on the final exam. Sands and Shelton (2010) used a multiple measures assessment. Part of the grade (25%) counted toward the outcome of the simulation. Another 20% was based on an individual paper that included a brief summary of the bill and how well the bill addressed the policy issue from the perspective of the representative and the country. Reflection essay assessments accounted for another 20% and were used to measure pre- and post-simulation opinions of Congress. The remaining 35% measured student conceptual achievement from cumulative exams.

Much of the data used for assessment is qualitative, which makes it difficult to build a theoretical framework for the research that measures the efficacy of the simulation with respect to course goals and outcomes. While traditional research is based on testing a hypothesis, grounded theory goes beyond testing assumptions and seeks to explain the data's patterns, relationships, and themes holistically. Grounded theory therefore extends the analysis to "developing categories, themes, or other taxonomic classes that interpret the meaning of the data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 193) and provides a process to look critically and intuitively at the data collected without the adverse effects of preconceived assumptions or conclusions that could color impartial analysis (Merriam, 2009; Willis, 2007; Creswell, 2007).

2. Developing an Interactive, Multidisciplinary Simulation Exercise

A simulation exercise can be quite robust, engaging, and multifaceted in ways that develop higher order thinking and learning. As explained to the cadets in the SS202/American Politics core course, the purpose of the congressional simulation exercise (SIMEX) is to:

> "create an environment in which you can experiment and *apply* your knowledge and understanding of American Politics. It is for you to *experience* the tension, conflicting pressures, and the challenges that our political leaders face in governing our nation. The purpose is not to test your ability to accurately trace the steps of the law making process (we will assume you know this by the time we conduct the SIMEX), nor is it to test your ability to create a "good" policy (a topic we will discuss during the last block of the course). The SIMEX will demonstrate to you both the frailty and the resilience of our Republican form of government (USMA, 2014, p. 1).

While the SS202 SIMEX is an adaptation of simulations used by Harvard and other institutions, many aspects were completely redesigned in order to meet specific course-wide and individual classroom goals. Each instructor selected students to serve in leadership roles during this exercise in order to determine how in-class activity manifested outside of the classroom. Later, based on feedback from the cadets selected for leadership positions, future iterations of the SIMEX allowed students to elect their leadership. Further, the course director adopted some of the "best practices" from my classroom and implemented them across the course to maximize feedback and experiment with the effectiveness of certain simulation techniques beyond my individual sections.

In my classroom, the central theme of the course material revolves around a single question posed to the cadets during their first lesson, reinforced throughout the semester, and experimented through the SIMEX: "Can you be good officers without being good citizens?" While I tell them that after 40 lessons there will still be no right answer, the classroom experience is designed to help them learn *how* to answer that question, not teach them *what* the answer to this or any other question actually is or should be. The SIMEX is as an opportunity for them to experience citizenship and public service within the institutions of Congress, the executive branch, interest group lobbyists and media personnel. Through political conflict, competition, negotiation and compromise, cadets in my class experience the challenges of democratic government. Further, the moral-ethical decision-making environment present by role playing helps cadets in my class experience the transformative leadership aspects of conflict mediation. Finally, I ask cadets in my class before the beginning of the SIMEX for their qualitative impressions of Congress and the law-making process. Cadets match the public in their lack of faith or trust in Congress specifically and government in general. I then ask cadets if the reason why the legislature gets such negative reviews from them and the American public is because we keep sending "bad people" to Washington DC, or if the rules of our government as defined by electoral politics, the Constitution, and over 230 years of practice require any player in our government to act the same way. Cadet participation in the SIMEX is comprehensive and challenging in order to meet these objectives.

West Point has experimented with how to execute the SIMEX most effectively in terms of time and resources. During the first two years of its existence, the SIMEX was a full-day experience in which instructors designated cadets as members of the House and Senate, presidential advisors, media, and interest groups who were presented with the challenge of passing a bill on immigration reform. Later iterations were reduced to one two-hour lab period (including the cadets' lunch hour, for a three-hour SIMEX) plus one briefing lab. More recently, the SIMEX involved only the deliberations of House members and another lab was added for committee work.

In its present configuration, instructors use four lab periods to allow cadets adequate time to prepare for the SIMEX. American Politics is a 3.5 credit class with a two-hour lab every other week. In order to better align with institutional sustainability goals, the current bill under consideration involves energy policy. During the initial briefing, a Department of Physics and Nuclear Engineering faculty member briefs the cadets on the environmental implications of various energy choices along with a faculty member from the Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering. Additionally, cadets have access to reading resources that further explain the nuances of comprehensive energy reform.

The first lab is devoted to engaging in energy policy discussions and introducing cadets to the role they will play for the entirety of the exercise. The second lab is an overview of how the SIMEX works, what is expected, and the election of the Speaker of the House and selection of other leadership positions to include committee chairs and ranking members. The third lab is devoted to committee meetings and party caucuses.

The fourth lab is the actual simulation, run over a three-hour period and resulting in a vote. There are four class groups each semester of about 100 cadets per class group, therefore, the SIMEX is done in four separate iterations every semester.

The "front end" work for the faculty can be daunting. In order to manage, operate, and assess the utility of this simulation, faculty collaborated on the political objectives, defined the roles to simulate real-world politics, and assigned students their individual roles for the duration of the exercise. Each student had a specific and unique role with explicit outcomes that, if achieved (the bill passed with the right set of amendments), would maximize the student's potential grade.

2.1. SIMEX Roles

Energy policy is the focus of the SIMEX because the United States Military Academy, in conjunction with the Army Chief of Staff, has made energy reform an institutional objective. From the political perspective, the bill focuses on four major policy areas including Environmental Impacts, Future Energy Investment, Cap and Trade System, and Budget/Funding mechanisms. Table 1 outlines the policy options offered to students in the comprehensive energy bill. Developing these policy objectives required instructors to research current policy, interview experts in the energy field, and find relevant political discourse on each alternative in an effort to provide context to students throughout the exercise.

With the completion of the overarching policy opportunities for students to explore, the next step is to create the roles. Breaking down the roles into members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, interest groups, presidential advisors and the media sets the framework for the exercise. Without specific identities, 100+ cadets could never accurately simulate the multiple actors involved in the law-making process. During this phase instructors must develop identity narratives that describe for students who they are, where they are from, and what their political and policy goals vis-à-vis energy. Additional research on members of Congress, the bureaucracy, think-tanks, and other news sources revealed a multi-dimensional political landscape. Roles for the media outlets include the Washington Post, New York Times, CNN, Huffington Post, and Fox News. Interest groups consisted of Greenpeace, George Soros, the Koch Brothers, Renewable Fuels Association, American Petroleum Institute, the American Energy Alliance and The Office of the Assistance Secretary of Defense for Operational Energy Plans and Programs (OEP&P), Department of Defense. Also participating are key presidential advisors from the Cabinet including the Secretaries of Energy, State, Defense and Interior.

Within Congress the two major parties are distributed among three committees (Natural Resources, Energy and Budget) and individual Congressman are regionally and politically distinct as outlined in Table 2.

The preparation described is necessary before students are even introduced to the exercise. Instructors assign each of their cadets to specific roles and provide the students with the narratives on their identity during the first lab period. Students are then required to produce a one-page biography that brings to life their role in the SIMEX. This biography includes education and professional history and a brief statement on their energy goals. Individual biographies are returned to the instructors and made available to all SIMEX participants prior to the initial lab meeting so students have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with others in the SIMEX and perhaps begin to understand which characters will be allies and which will be adversaries in the political process.

3. Running the SIMEX

The SIMEX begins with an introduction brief to cadets that is designed to outline the main purpose, goals, rules, and grading for the exercise. Instructors conduct this presentation to cadets; this initial briefing occurs in a large auditorium with all 100+ students involved in the exercise. The brief also introduces the graded requirements, the schedule of events, and the concept of political capital as a measure of success for the exercise. At the end of the introduction brief cadets are separated by their roles and receive individual instructor points of contact to help them understand their assignment. The Republican caucus uses this time elect a Speaker. This student leader is then empowered to select (on his or her own criteria) a majority leader, whip, and five committee chairs. The Democratic caucus elects a minority leader. He or she selects a whip and five committee ranking members. These cadets represent the primary leaders in the House for the duration of the exercise.

The most difficult challenge of any role-playing event is convincing the participants that this is not a 'one-time' iteration that has no future impacts. In reality, the behavior of all players is affected by the knowledge that this 'game' is played over and over again on other policies, elections, and day-to-day routines.

Students simulating journalists may be incentivized to behave a certain way for this single graded assignment because they are not worried that they will ever have to interact with their classmates in the same roles again. To this end, a portion of the student grade is a reflective essay that forces them to explain their actions to their constituents as they seek re-election, renewed subscription to the news source, continued service in the President's administration, or annual dues to the interest group. The honor code also presents a significant challenge to cadets as they realize such a code is not suspended during the simulation and they explore the boundaries of making strategic statements or claims that are untruthful. This helps fix a major shortcoming of any simulation; the fact that the one-time game cannot replicate the long-term relationships created among media, lobbyists, and politicians that deter nefarious behavior like lying or cheating that might create a reputation that has long-term effects. Many students in simulations may feel free to lie or cheat to achieve short-term goals knowing full well that there will never be a future simulation where the object of their action has a chance for retribution. The Cadet Honor Code helps ensure cadets participating in the simulation avoid such temptations, making the SIMEX a more real-world representation.

Political capital vouchers are designed to enable participants to bargain for outcomes. Cadets' grades are directly affected by not only the policy outcomes, but also by the credibility or influence they generate for themselves throughout the process. It is important to note that part of running the SIMEX is introducing cadets to the rules and procedures of the political capital voucher.

The political capital vouchers simulate influence, reputation, and credibility developed over long-term relationships between lawmakers, journalists, and interest groups. As a way to demonstrate to cadets that real life law-making is not a one-time event, political capital vouchers help cadets leverage funding for future campaigns, TV advertisements, allegiance on future votes or a myriad of other activities that could occur in a long term political environment among professionals. As cadets accumulate political vouchers their grade increases. Each policy outcome is associated with a grade and the amount of political capital (both positive and negative) will be added to the outcome score to achieve a final grade.

Once the initial brief is complete, the SIMEX truly becomes a student-driven exercise where instructors strive to limit their number of interjections into the simulation. The third lab meeting is a student leadership-managed committee and party caucus gathering. Instructors do not attend these meetings; instead, they can follow developments of these meetings through the "media" (use of the Blackboard website for each media outlet) on the SIMEX website as the public would follow the news of events inside the Beltway.

During the fourth and final lab period, instructors supervise proceedings on the House floor. Instructors coordinate for the logistics of auditorium space, tables, chairs, music, and a guest speaker to provide a Presidential Address to Congress. The acting President is someone familiar to the students: the Academic Dean, the School President, or another senior administrator. Recently, the head football coach and a former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy Policy have played the role of President of the United States for the SIMEX. At the conclusion of the President's address the student Speaker of the House has the opportunity to provide the Republican response to the assembled House. One instructor plays the role of parliamentarian throughout this part of the SIMEX, ensuring students adhere to simple rules of respect for others when it is their turn to speak and to ensure the exercise meets the time and other logistic constraints. The Speaker concludes remarks and releases the House from the floor to conduct informal caucus meetings and press conferences for about an hour.

At the end of the caucus the House reconvenes and the Speaker introduces the bill (marked up by committees over the past 2 weeks) and opens debate on the floor. Instructors, acting as parliamentarians, ensure debate is done in a respectful manner and follows the strict rules for debate in the House specific to time allocations. Instructors also adjudicate votes for amendments during the floor debate including vote counting.

When the debate time expires, the Speaker requests to move to the previous question for an "up-down" vote on the Bill. Instructors afford members of Congress one last opportunity to decide if they are unhappy with the Bill the Speaker presents. Since the students may not be happy with the actions of their Speaker (constitutionally, the Speaker is actually selected by a simple majority of the members of Congress and is typically a ranking member of the majority party), students are given the opportunity to vote to remove the Speaker and install a new Speaker that may provide a better policy outcome. If a motion to remove the Speaker is offered and seconded, instructors count votes. Once a Speaker is replaced or endorsed the final vote proceeds.

Instructors record House members vote on a public screen so news, interest groups, Presidential advisors, and other members of Congress can observe.

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At the conclusion of the vote, instructors collect political capital vouchers, announce the results of the vote and determine whether or not the President vetoes, then the exercise is concluded with a brief discussion or after-action review about the cadet experience during the SIMEX.

Students have a reflective essay to complete within one week of the event and instructors must determine the validity of political capital vouchers and assign a grade for each participant based on the political outcome of the bill. Each iteration may have different policy options and some may result in no bill being passed at all. Instructors must individually assess each role-player based on these political and policy results.

4. Assessing the SIMEX

The mastery of the course concepts is assessed in other assignments, including a policy paper and exams. For the SIMEX, the goal of the experience was to:

1. Create an environment in which cadets could experiment and apply their knowledge and understanding of American politics;
2. Experience the tension, conflicting pressures, and the challenges that political leaders face in governing the nation, and
3. Demonstrate both the frailty and the resilience of our republican form of government.
4. Develop, lead, and inspire people and facilitate these abilities in others in support of the WPLDS.

The faculty felt that the SIMEX needed to engage students on a deeper level and focus on not just the process of passing a bill, but also the institutional outcomes of developing critical thinking, analysis, leadership, team building, ethical conduct, negotiation, and collaboration skills. The Department of Social Sciences, particularly the American Politics/SS202 course, used multiple methods to assess the effectiveness of the SIMEX. There were two graded assignments, an online assessment and a reflection paper. The assessment was graded strictly on participation, not on quality of contribution and the points were used from the instructor's participation grade.

The assessment questionnaire was designed to encourage self-reflection on the cadets' engagement with the components of the SIMEX process as well as offer insights for areas of improvement. There were 524 assessment entries to each of the four prompts. The responses from each prompt filled over 30 single spaced pages of text.

1. How did the simulation work out for you? What went right? What went wrong?
2. What could you have done differently to change the outcome of the SIMEX to be more favorable to you or your party?
3. What specifically did you do to prepare for the SIMEX? (Legislative websites, research, etc.) How much time did you invest in the preparation? What did you do that was most beneficial?
4. What do you recommend be done for next year to improve the experience?

The reflection paper was worth 75 points out of the 200 points total for the SIMEX grade. This assignment was designed to encourage the cadets to reflect on the process of passing bills and to think about how their actions in the SIMEX aligned with their responsibilities to their constituents. In crafting their responses to the reflection paper, cadets needed to consider their leadership, communication, negotiation, and team-building skills, using their ethical compass to justify their actions. There were 573 responses to the reflection paper that when merged, filled over 463 pages of single spaced text.

The following prompt was used for the House members:

"Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion." - Edmund Burke, who was voted out of Britain's House of Commons in 1780 because of his support for unpopular causes.
Energy policy is likely to be a major issue during the 2016 elections. Your local newspaper has provided you the opportunity to write a 600-800 word essay that explains your vote during the SIMEX. How will you justify your vote to your constituents? If you chose to vote against your constituents' preferences (as reflected on your role sheet), why did you do so?

Your instructor will base your grade primarily on how persuasive your essay would be to voters in your district during a general election. But remember, actions speak louder than words. Even an extremely well-crafted essay is unlikely to persuade voters if your vote does not represent their interests.

There may, nevertheless, be good reasons for you to vote against your constituents. As a leader, you might hold policy positions or embrace ethical values that make it necessary to vote your conscience. If you deem it necessary to vote against your constituents' preferences, you should justify your vote based on your leadership philosophy or ethical values. Nevertheless, you also should realize that a conscience vote may cost you – just as it did for Edmund Burke – if you cannot persuade your constituents of the rightness of your cause."

5. Using Assessment to Inform Change

The most recent iteration of the SIMEX provided some interesting challenges to the cadets. In one section, the cadets were able to pass a bill that was significantly favorable to one party that was assured a Presidential veto, and passed an override to the veto. In another section, cadets were virtually deadlocked on selecting funding amendments. In all cases, cadets had to find creative and innovative solutions to very complex problems.

The SIMEX is designed to model the tensions that are inherent in the legislative process. Cadets had to make some decisions in accordance with their assigned roles and the constituents who elected them (and would reelect them), or make individual decisions and try to maximize their chances for a good grade. While the honor code is never suspended, cadets are allowed to assume the roles of their political characters. The cadets get to decide what kind of "operator" that person will be. It is in this environment that cadets can experiment with different leadership strategies.

6. Assessing Leadership

The SIMEX assessment was designed to evaluate the SIMEX experience and the results of both the assessment and the reflection paper provided invaluable insights into ways to make the SIMEX more meaningful. However, as the results were being reviewed, certain themes emerged that proved just as enlightening.

When asked, "How did the SIMEX work out for you? What went right? What went wrong?" nearly one-fifth of the responses specifically mentioned "lead/leadership/leading." On closer examination, the cadets were clear that they observed leadership in all of its forms. Most cadets noted instances of strong, ethical leadership that forged alliances and worked to build consensus. This comment captured that posture of positive leadership:

I am happy with the way that the leadership reached out to all members to see how people felt about various proposals. I think that we managed to get the optimum compromise that was beneficial to our party but tolerable to the opposition party.

Although not as common, other cadets observed toxic leadership and selfish actions from their classmates, particularly those in a position of leadership.

The purpose of the SIMEX was to exercise moral leadership, understand ethical responsibilities, and develop teams throughout the law-making process. In reality everyone was worried about collecting the maximum amount of capital points.

More unsettling were the comments that reflected poor ethical behavior when the lure of improving individual grades overrode good judgment. While rare, this comment highlights a cadet's experience with questionable behavior of a classmate.

I had made agreements with several people to work together and not try and stab each other in the back. I expected people to act honorably and honor this agreement and other deals I made…[One cadet] outright lied and cheated me. I was not expecting him to put his grade above a friendship, outright lie to my face over the course of weeks, and go against the honor code in such a blatant way. I was not prepared for the backhandedness of the SIMEX.

But there were lessons to be learned about observing the best and worst in leadership and character.

I learned that being in the majority is a big plus, sacrificing integrity for personal gain is not going to get you very far, and it's not always easy to balance what constituents want with what is being pushed down from higher.

Leadership is also about communication, negotiation, teamwork, and use of power. In framing their answers, cadets referenced certain key themes related to leadership in their comments. The following themes were identified, as well as how many of the comments contained these key terms.

- "lead/leader/leadership" 17%;

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- "persuade/deal/negotiate/influence/barter/scheme" 22%;
- "team/teamwork/caucus/coalition/alliance/friend/meeting" 19%;
- "compromise" 7%;
- "communicate/talk/discuss/collaborate/meet/met with/inform/information" 18%;
- "power/powerful/powerless" 5%; and,
- "ethics, moral, value, character" 3%.

When "leadership" is cross-tabbed with other key terms, the true nature of the leader development process begins to emerge. These cadets offered insights about how they could have used their leadership skills to influence the outcome of the bill. These comments illustrate the complexity of the decision process and also the tensions that played out during the exercise.

"My ideology did not completely align with the final bill that was passed, but I was able to cobble together a few points here and there within each topic of the bill. Gaining political capital points by working out a few last-minute deals with interest groups went right, netting me a little bit of political capital to offset my losses with the final bill. And everything else went wrong. My party leadership was in shambles, and Democrats were just trying to minimize their losses by selling their votes instead of grouping together and overtaking the Republican's very slim majority."

It was clear that the SIMEX created an opportunity for cadets to practice their leadership skills. As a result of the preliminary assessment, some changes to the SIMEX were made to include purposeful leadership experiences. More presidential advisors were added and tasked with serving in various positions with divergent interests so the group of advisors faced challenges internally to the administration as well as towards congress. Additionally, more committees (which require increased numbers of committee chairs and ranking members) also expanded the numbers of cadets with formal leadership responsibilities in the simulated House of Representatives. Last, the assessment prompts themselves were changed to collect focused data on the leadership experience. The new prompts included:

- How did the simulation work out for you? What went right? What went wrong?
- What concepts from what we have studied so far in SS202 were solidified by the SIMEX experience? What is the single best lesson about American Politics that you learned?
- How did this experience help you grow as a leader? What lessons did you learn about leadership, ethics, team work, or decision making?
- What do you recommend be done next semester to improve the experience?

These reflection papers can now be used to assess the West Point Leader Development strategic goals. Using Value Rubrics, the reflection papers have been used to assess critical and creative thinking, and ethical reasoning. By leveraging the artifacts of learning, the ability to assess authentic learning ensures a truer understanding of cadet development.

In future iterations of the SIMEX, the prompts will be changed to specifically ask how the SIMEX improved their understanding of the legislative process and how the experience helped them grow as leaders. As more data are collected, a clearer understanding of how the SIMEX can be better leveraged for leader development will be expanded.

The coordination and execution of the SIMEX aligns with major tenets of the West Point Leader Development System, which requires cadets to exercise peer leadership in complex environments. The SIMEX is designed to force cadets into having their own experiences with moral-ethical decision making. As cadets study in the classroom and observe for themselves the difficulty of leading the nation as elected civilian and military leaders, role-playing during the SIMEX enables these cadets to wrestle with similar issues about principles, party and personal loyalty, constitutional authority, and constituent desires.

The SIMEX helps future military leaders to become cognizant of the political pressures that impact civilian leaders who control the national security apparatus. Cadets get to experience decision making methods in ways a classroom study of law, regulation and politics is unable to provide. Most importantly, cadets gain an understanding of where military officers fit into public policy while reflecting on the military's subordination to civilian leadership.

While no simulation can ever meet all aspects of character training or development, the American Politics Congressional Simulation Exercise provides cadets a significant opportunity to implement their own leader strategies and endure those of their peers experimenting at the same time. We believe this is a valuable educational tool precisely because it complements the Academy mission to be the number one character development school in the world, and because the SIMEX contributes to the leadership laboratory opportunities cadets need to understand their role as citizen-soldiers.

This article represents the perspective and opinion of the authors and does not in any way reflect the views or policy of the U.S. Army, the Department of Defense, or the government of the United States of America.

Table 1
Policy Options

Environmental Impacts			Investment Strategy		
Eliminate the EPA; remove fracking bans ($2B)	Regulate commercial impacts of fossil fuel consumption ($1B)	Expand EPA jurisdiction; increase fines for violations ($1B)	Prioritize fossil fuel extraction and exports ($50B)	No exports; subsidize renewable sources ($15B)	Prioritize renewable energy, increase carbon tax ($5B)
Cap and Trade			Funding		
No cap and trade system ($6B)	Increase biofuel production; increase fuel economy standards ($10B)	Establish federal cap and trade; incentivize states ($16B)	Eliminate tax breaks on fossil fuel consumption (unlimited)	Fine employers for exceeding EPA standards (up to 15%)	Cut spending on welfare, govt agencies, foreign aid (unlimited)

Table 2
SIMEX Roles

Republican Roles	Democrat Roles
Ideologically Pure Conservative	Ideologically Pure Liberal
Conservative from a coastal area	Liberal from a Coastal Area
Conservative with strong business	Liberal with strong business
Conservative from a district rich in natural resources	Liberal from a district rich in natural resources
Moderate Conservative with heterogeneous district	Moderate Liberal with heterogeneous district
Moderate Conservative with Large Tea Party presence	Moderate Liberal from a coastal region
	Moderate Liberal from an area rich in natural resources

POLITICAL CAPITAL VOUCHER   5 CREDITS

Presidential Advisor – Cadet X
Transfer Political Capital Voucher to Republican Congressman – Cadet Y

The President will not endorse or campaign for the Democrat nominee for your seat in Nov 2014.

POLITICAL CAPITAL VOUCHER   5 CREDITS

GREENPEACE

• Political capital vouchers can be transferred multiple times

• Vouchers can be used for both POSITIVE and NEGATIVE credit

• You CANNOT keep your own political capital voucher, but there is no limit to how much you can collect from others

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